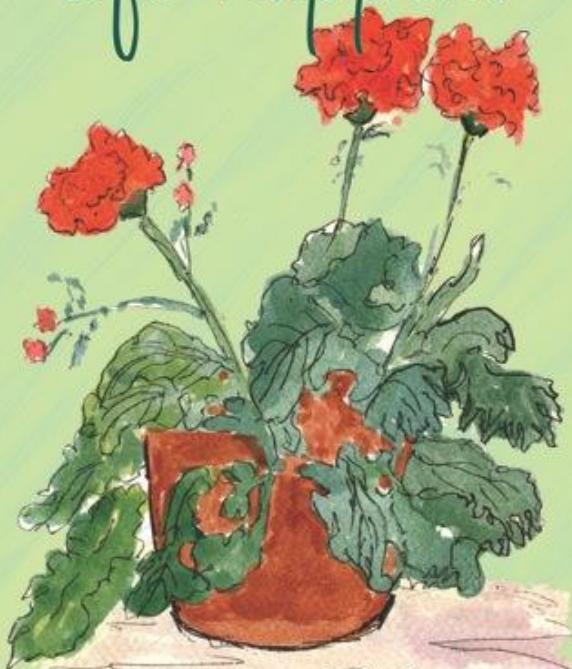


life happens



Dayle

A collection of short stories  
by Dayle Herstik



# *Life Happens*

a collection of short stories  
by Dayle Herstik



Open Door Publications

**Life Happens**  
a collection of short stories  
Copyright © 2013 by Dayle Herstik

ISBN: 978-0-9789782-7-3

All rights reserved.  
Printed in the United States

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Published by  
Open Door Publications  
27 Carla Way  
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648  
[www.OpenDoorPublications.com](http://www.OpenDoorPublications.com)

Cover Design by Jessica Chao

For Larry

and for my family  
without whom there would be no stories.

*Life is what happens  
while you are busy making other plans*

*John Lennon*

# *Table of Contents*

About the Book .....	7
Market Day .....	10
The Wedding .....	15
Women and Their Mothers .....	22
Night Out .....	26
A Quiet Vacation.....	32
Do Me a Favor .....	37
The Visit.....	43
New York City Dream.....	47
Afternoon Bridge .....	53
Matilda and Sadie.....	56
White Tiles.....	59
Coming Back to Life .....	64
Piano Lessons .....	71
Forest Encounter .....	80
Without Warning.....	84
Glad Tidings .....	89
The Apartment .....	95
Cookies and Milk.....	100
Plenty of Bananas .....	103
Poetic License .....	108
Afterlife.....	114
About the Author.....	119

## *About the Book*

In between events, appointments and obligations, life happens. Every day is an experience, even when we do nothing memorable. It can be said if it is not written, it didn't happen. When I turned fifty I decided to keep a journal, although actually I had been writing, all along, about events, milestones and my thoughts.

The journal began with a few sentences, as suggested in *The Artist's Way*, a book by Julia Cameron. As days passed, the sentences turned into paragraphs, and then into pages. These pages were about feelings and relationships, ideas and observations – some profound, some mundane. After several years I looked back on the pages

and remembered events, saw my kids evolve and myself grow and change.

Tales of love, anger, fear, frustration, sadness and joy morphed into little vignettes, little plays about me and other members of the cast. The main characters remain constant while other bit players made brief appearances, some forgettable, some impressionable. You can learn from everyone, even if what you learn is how you don't want to be.

I am a part of all the stories, but not always the main character. I have taken the liberty to embellish, of course, change names and introduce other characters here and there. All the stories are based on my experiences, observations or overheard conversations. One could say these narratives are works of fiction based on true events.

The small dramas of everyday life can be either distressing or absurd, but they seem very important at the moment. Most of the time they are not life-shattering, but they could be. They can be translated into a thriller as a woman meets a strange man on market day, the humor of hearing the silent thoughts of the members of a wedding

party, or the poignancy of a visit with a longtime friend.

For me, writing is remembering and reminding myself that every day of my life is meaningful, even those days when nothing much happens but life.

# *Market Day*

The man sat down beside me on the bus even though there were many empty seats. I wouldn't have thought anything of it were he Mexican, but his boots told me otherwise. He was American, and I started to feel uneasy when the bus began to empty and he didn't budge. There were plenty of window seats, certainly a preference in this ancient vehicle without air conditioning. I looked out of the window at the dry landscape, and I could see his reflection watching me. His baseball cap was turned around, the brim to the back. That immediately signaled something. Arrogance? Belligerence? I

wasn't sure, but anyway, I knew it was an attitude I didn't like.

I was anxious to get to the big market where I would meet my husband, Charlie. His morning appointment had delayed him, and we could not travel together as usual. Tuesday was our day to shop for our weekly provisions of fresh fruits and vegetables and whatever else caught our eye.

A few Mexicans remained on the bus, carrying their colorful empty sacks ready to fill with their weekly shopping purchases. I was glad they were there, even though they paid no attention to me. Americans were not an unusual sight on this line. The bus swerved, and I could feel the man's thigh pressing against mine. He did not adjust it when the bus leveled. My heart skipped a beat, and I had a strange feeling around my ears.

"This is my first time here," he said as the bus rounded the bend. "I sure could use a guide, especially one who speaks my language."

I was really uptight now. I ignored his comment. His squinty eyes said more than his words.

The bus stopped and the doors opened to let in a rush of warm air. I jumped up, being unnecessarily rude to the quiet and patient passengers. Clutching my plaid shopping bag, I pushed ahead of everyone. I nearly tumbled out of the bus, my eyes searching in all directions. I swallowed reflexively. A dry swallow. My water bottle remained in my purse.

No Charlie. I was already ten minutes late. He should have been there. He's never late. He's the one who waits. Not me. I glanced back. There was the man, walking fast, separated from me by a half dozen people. He stepped up his pace. He spotted me near the entrance to the market. He broke into a slow run. I froze.  
*Charlie, where are you?*

I didn't want to start shopping alone, even though the market was familiar. It's hard to find each other if you don't stick together. The man came closer, never taking his eyes off of me. His open shirt revealed a hairy chest and chains around his neck, his dirty boots kicking up dust.  
*That's it! Charlie or no Charlie, I'm out of here.*

I turned and walked quickly into the market. The canopy cut the glare. I made a

left at the chickens and a quick right at the first vegetable stand. I needed vegetables, but this was not a good time. I walked past the ribbon table and made another right at the table piled with jeans. I ducked under the hanging tablecloths and looked around. The vendors were occupied with their wares, paying no heed to someone in distress.

My stalker was nowhere in sight. I felt relieved and slowed my pace, but kept my guard up. I decided to take the circuitous route and return to the entrance, hoping to find Charlie. Surely he'd be there by now. I made a left turn at the tortilla stand where the same family I knew from previous visits sat preparing for the day's sales. I froze.

There, with his back to me, was the man from the bus. He was not shopping. He was searching. For me. My stomach tightened. I needed a bathroom, which, of course, is unavailable inside the market. My mouth went dry. I held my breath. I uprooted my feet, and as I turned, so did he, and I saw him see me.

I ran in and out of the stalls. I ran to the beat of the music. I ran past the watermelons, almost knocked over the

papayas and mangoes. I ran past the peppers and the chilies. I ran past the beans and the avocados. I ran past the candies and the hardware and finally the chickens. I got out into the sunlight.

And there he was...

# Glad Tidings

The alarm and phone rang simultaneously. Annie was jolted out of sleep as darkness behind her eyes gave way to light. The phone rang again. She hit the alarm and picked up the phone. She whispered in a questioning manner, “Hello?” *Who could be calling at this hour*, she wondered. Realizing that it was the wrong end of the phone, she switched hands and repeated, “Hello? Who’s this?”

“Annie, it’s me, Phyllis. There’s news. She’s dead. Did you hear me? She’s dead!”

Annie opened her eyes and raised herself up on her elbow. “Phyllis? What?

Who's dead? Do you know what time it is?  
Is it Monday? Where are you?"

"Wake up, Annie. Glad tidings are welcome at any hour. You have to get up anyway. It's Irma. She's dead. Ding dong, the witch is dead."

Annie took a moment to grasp the words. She sat up, pulling the phone off the night table. "You're serious, aren't you? Was she murdered?"

"No, nothing so dramatic or newsworthy. Listen, meet me for breakfast at eight and I'll fill you in. And look good. We have a funeral to go to."

"Phyl, I don't know if I should laugh or cry."

"Dear friend. Why would you cry?"

"If she didn't suffer." Annie hung up the phone.

Annie drove into the parking lot of the Uptown Diner, avoiding the icy patches. She maneuvered around the mounds of snow, remarking to herself how many people don't eat breakfast at home. Once inside, she was greeted by familiar faces and the fresh aroma of coffee. *This place has the best coffee*, she thought.

She spotted Phyllis and slid into the booth opposite her friend and colleague.

She looked straight into her eyes. “So? Details, please, and don’t leave anything out.”

The waitress appeared with the coffee pot and filled two cups. She glanced at Annie.

“I’ll have a corn muffin, please. Lightly toasted. Thanks.”

The waitress glanced at Phyllis. “I’ll have two eggs easy over, whole wheat toast, home fries and some tomatoes. Thanks.” She left with the order and the two friends sat back and smiled.

“Such news is worthy of a culinary celebration.”

“Nice dress. You look chic. Red is definitely your color,” said Phyllis as she sipped her coffee.

“Phyllis! The suspense is killing me. Forget I said that. How did you find out? No. That’s not important. HOW? WHEN? Irma! Unbelievable!”

Phyllis took a sip of her coffee. “It’s so amazing. She was so deserving. She fell down the subway steps and hit her head...not unconscious, which was good, since she was probably aware of what was happening. She was with you know who, so the bad part is she wasn’t alone.

“Of course the good part is that the fact that they were together requires an explanation. Anyway, eventually the EMS arrived and carted her off to St. Vincent’s Hospital. I heard she screamed at them as they put her on the stretcher.”

“Phyllis! Stop with the obvious. I want details. What was broken? How many limbs? Ruptured spleen? No conjecture please, just the facts, ma’am.”

“Okay, okay. Don’t be so impatient. It gets better.”

The waitress arrived with the orders. Annie leaned closer to Phyllis, eager for more of the gory details.

“I got the call last night...you were away so I didn’t get to you. It happened Friday night. She and Jerome, uch, were on the way home from somewhere, wherever home is these days now that she left that creep of a husband. Too bad, they were so perfect for each other. She went from a creep to a schlep.” Phyllis salted the eggs and dipped a piece of toast into the yolk and savored a bite. She dabbed at her lips with a napkin.

“Have some potatoes,” she offered as she took a bite.

“Phyllis, who cares about her rotten taste in men. It’s common knowledge that she’s...was...that sounds better, the CEO of creeps. What else about her untimely demise?”

Annie took a forkful of potatoes.

“They got her to the emergency room and determined that she had several facial fractures including that nose, which must have been hard to tell, given what she looked like before. Anyway one ankle was smashed, four broken ribs, one of which punctured a lung. A broken shoulder and the piece de resistance: several teeth were knocked out. It seems she was carrying something, so that exacerbated her injuries.

“They hooked her up, IV and all, and after a few hours they noticed something on the monitor. To make a long story short, she had a heart attack. And that, my dear, was that.”

Annie took a bite of muffin and a sip of coffee. “That’s it? She didn’t linger in agony? Where is the justice??

“My dear friend and colleague, the justice is that she was aware, had great pain and she is dead. True, it would have been nice to visit her at least once while

she was rigged up, just to witness her humiliation and agony. On another note, the office will never be the same. No more Attila the Hun. I wonder who will fill her shoes?" Phyllis mopped up the remainder of her breakfast and sipped the coffee. "That was all very satisfying."

"Be that as it may, what time is the funeral?"

"Twelve o'clock, at Bernstein Brothers. What do you think? An open casket, just to make sure it's her?"

"Phyllis, get a grip. There are no open caskets at Jewish funerals. Hey! Look at the time. We should go to the office. How do I look? I love your suit. Great color. Purple. Perfect for a funeral."

# *The Apartment*

*What a trip. I'm positively nauseous.  
I'm glad I'm not a commuter. And the  
elevator. Heavy claustrophobia. And, if  
you live here, you're always in it, for sure.  
Even for the mail. What's that smell?  
Someone has actually cooked something.  
Uch!*

*One key for two locks. Good. Oooo!  
What have we here? So this is the city  
thing. She calls this a living room? Look  
at this place. Who can see out of those  
windows? And what do you look at,  
anyway? Buses, trucks, cars. No trees. No  
birds. No landscaping. No pool. Wait.*

*There's a bird on the sill leaving a deposit.  
Oh, well!*

*First things first; let me find the bathroom. Hmm! I almost missed it. Now this is really boring. Grey floor. White tile. One sink? No silk flowers. No window, no linen closet. No Jacuzzi. Well there is a tub, and it's enclosed. No stall shower. At least the plumbing works.*

*I need some water. What's this? A closet without a door? It's the kitchen. How old is this stove? The counter space is like a postage stamp. Look at this freezer. Ice cube trays. No ice maker. How primitive. This is some refrigerator. Not much food in it. And this fridge! Almost empty. Here's the water. Good. I hope it's filtered. I better check under the sink. Who knows what's floating in city water? Good. It's filtered. Paper cup. Who uses paper cups except at a barbecue? Chintzy. Where's the dishwasher? None? Who can live without a dishwasher? I guess with a kitchen like this one must eat out all the time. Not so terrible, I guess.*

*What's doing in the closets? I can't believe this. No new dishes. The same everything, only less. I wonder what she did with the Rosenthal china? Where's her*

*crystal? What happened to all those great platters I always borrowed? Now the pots are hanging from the ceiling. You could get a concussion if you're tall enough. At least the dining room, excuse me, the eating area, is close to the kitchen. I wonder what she did with the formal dining room set that seats fourteen? Now they always have to eat in the dining room, or whatever it is, not like before, a separate dining room for a special occasion. It's a good thing there's a window. The kitchen is like a cave.*

*Huh! Here's a door. Will you look at this? A terrace. It's one quarter the size of their old deck. What's that black stuff all over the place? It looks like soot. Some difference from the backyard with the swimming pool. No gas grill? Deprived. For sure.*

*Now for the bedrooms. Oh, I mean bedroom. It can't be too far. Oh! How can they survive in this cubby hole? The computer is in here as well as the TV. One, two closets. Where are all her clothes? There's nothing here. She has only one closet for herself? It's not even a walk-in. Who can live like this? Well! What do you know? There's the dining room table.*

*Behind the bed! The dining room table is the headboard!! What happened to the legs?*

*Come to think of it, there's no washer and dryer. I bet she goes to the basement to do the laundry – in the elevator! Unbelievable. They gave up a four-bedroom, three-bathroom, two-car garage mansion on a gorgeous piece of property in Great Neck for this.*

*No Karistan? Plain wood floors? My grandmother had plain wood floors. Well, the piano looks okay. But there sure is a lot of stuff here. Books, newspapers and the couch looks as if someone was sleeping on it. Who uses a living room? Where's the den? What a life. Not for me. Downsizing? This is not downsizing. This is a cell with a couple of windows.*

“Oh, at last you’re home. Thanks for leaving the key with the doorman. What do I think? I think you are a genius. What a great place. Just right. The kitchen is perfect. No big tile floor to think about and enough space for whatever cooking you might want to do. The restaurants must be great, and so convenient. And the terrace.

How romantic. What a view. It must be great at night. Dazzling, I'm sure.

"The living room is perfect for conversation. It looks so comfy cozy. Oh! It's a pull out couch. Great for company. The bedroom's enormous. I can't believe how creative you are with space. Everything fits perfectly. And the wood floors are really nice. No carpet to vacuum. Allergy free. No matter where you live, your place is so inviting. I felt very much at home as soon as I walked in. The book club will love it!"

## *About the Author*

Dayle Herstik was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and has been writing since she was in her teens.

“Growing up in the 1950’s offered the best of everything,” she says. “That was the true age of innocence; the neighborhood provided friendships and a feeling of unity. To this day, I still have close ties with the friends of my childhood. We share memories of laughter and the special bond of people who remember us when.”

Dayle met her husband Larry, while attending Brooklyn College. She left school for marriage and the birth of her three children. Returning to college several

years later, she spent the next ten years combining school with parenthood. Ten years and two degrees later, she became a teacher of speech improvement, then a supervisor and administrator for the New York City public schools. She was also in private practice providing speech therapy for very young children.

During these years Dayle accumulated a trove of verse based on her experiences, which eventually became her first published work, a book of poetry, *When We Were Perfect*.

Dayle currently divides her time between Boca Raton, Florida, New Jersey, and the Adirondack mountains in New York State. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women.